

# The Critical Role of Local Governments in Community COMPASS

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In Hamilton County, local political jurisdictions have a critical role in creating and implementing countywide plans. Most people assume that the Board of County Commissioners can adopt a plan for Hamilton County and then proceed with implementation – not in Ohio.

## State Law and the County Plan

Ohio law does not authorize a Board of County Commissioners to adopt, modify or change a community plan unless first approved by the Regional or County Planning Commission. Therefore, the Hamilton County Commissioners can only adopt or deny a plan that the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) approves and certifies to it.

Ohio Law also provides that the County Commissioners' adoption of the plan only pertains to the unincorporated area – i.e., on behalf of the townships (townships are not authorized to adopt community plans). Therefore, for the plan to be accepted county wide, the state law requires the RPC to certify the plan that it adopts to each municipality and to the County Commissioners. In this way, Ohio law enables the RPC to be a catalyst for cooperative planning and intergovernmental coordination but implementation is largely dependent on endorsement by local governments.

The planning commissions and councils of each municipality have authority to take action on RPC's plan in accordance with the procedures adopted in their individual charters and their individual charter controls the effect of municipal adoption. Once the Board of County Commissioners adopts the plan, then (per Ohio Revised Code) "no public building, roadway, bridge, viaduct, or other public improvement or utility, publicly or privately owned, whose construction or location would constitute a departure from the plan, shall be constructed or authorized by the board except by unanimous vote".

## COMPASS Review Process

Achieving acceptance and implementation of countywide plans in a county with 49 political jurisdictions is a challenging and complex process -- and one of the most important future roles of the RPC and its Planning Partnership.

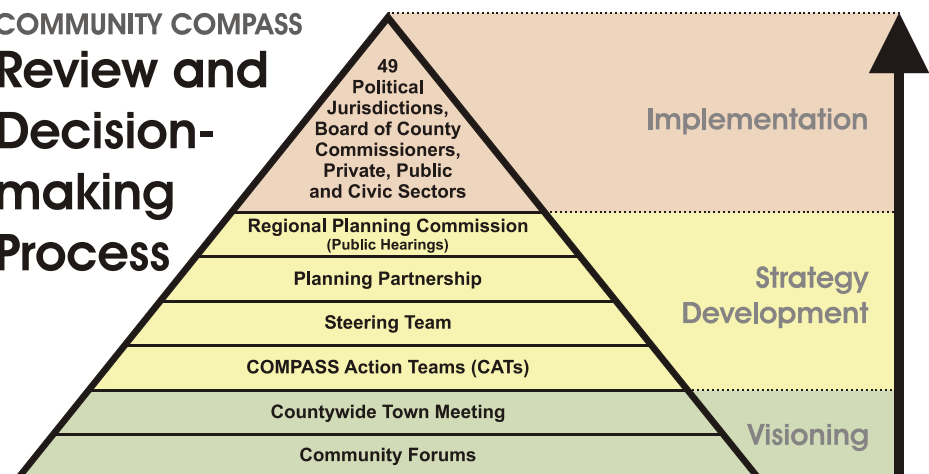
The Partnership is needed to help navigate Community COMPASS (Comprehensive Master Plan & Strategies for Hamilton County) through many levels of review and approval.

The chart entitled "Review and Decision-making Process" identifies the various levels of review and acceptance. It shows that citizen's recommendations (from Community Forums and the Countywide Town Meeting) as well as COMPASS Action Team recommendations are advisory to the COMPASS Steering Team (which includes over 70 representatives

from public, private and civic sector organizations and is a subcommittee of the Planning Partnership). The Steering Team recommendations are advisory to the Planning Partnership (which is the long-range planning committee of the Regional Planning Commission). The Planning Partnership recommendations are advisory to the Regional Planning Commission (which is an alliance of local

### COMMUNITY COMPASS

## Review and Decision-making Process



planning commissions and governing bodies in Hamilton County). The Regional Planning Commission (which will hold public hearings prior to plan adoption or modification) is advisory to all governing bodies in the County that are members of the commission including the Board of County Commissioners.

***The final arbiter of whether the end product of Community COMPASS is fair, balanced and reflective of community preferences will be each of the governing bodies in each of the communities in Hamilton County – with the Board of Hamilton County Commissioners being one of 50 decision making bodies.***

The level of comprehensiveness and balance of participation at the early phases of visioning and strategy development will be very important to the final decision makers.

## **Cooperative Planning**

The planning structure described here was largely established in 1929 with the creation of the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission. The intent was to institutionalize a “Cooperative Method” of coordinating countywide goals in a county that consisted of political subdivisions, each with a right to its own autonomy – the brainchild of Alfred Bettman, a Hamilton County Regional Planning Commissioner in 1929 and one of the most influential leaders in the national planning movement.

The “Cooperative Method” required political subdivisions to cooperate among themselves in order to overcome the problem of division. In other words, the problem would be solved not by eliminating the divisions but by establishing a structure to facilitate their cooperation. Today, this structure has been greatly enhanced by the formation of the Planning Partnership. The “Cooperative Method” (and now the Planning Partnership) attempts to solve the problem of division by accommodating it. The “Cooperative Method” of regional planning was initially adopted to avoid the need for metropolitan government, an idea that caught on in the U.S. in the 1920’s.

## **The Planning Partnership’s Role**

Due to the importance of local government in Ohio and in our county, the Planning

Partnership's role in reviewing, endorsing and building consensus (among 49 jurisdictions, 300+ elected officials, and 300+ planning commissioners -- as well as many civic, private and public sector organizations) is a critical part of the COMPASS process and is the foundation for sustaining the implementation effort. Without the Planning Partnership as a foundation, Community COMPASS would be impossible.

The role of Planning Partnership representatives (from each jurisdiction) is critical to the success of Community COMPASS.

***Appointed representatives must assure that COMPASS goals and recommendations are understood and discussed by their local planning commission and governing body.***

Similarly, the representatives of Affiliate Members (public, private and civic sector organizations) must assure that COMPASS goals and recommendations are understood and discussed by their organizations.

Now you know why nobody has attempted to adopt a comprehensive plan in Hamilton County for 40 years! With the establishment of the Planning Partnership and the commitment of its Representatives, we are now prepared to cooperatively and successfully create and implement a Comprehensive Master Plan and Strategies for Hamilton County – Community COMPASS.